

TRUTH & RECONCILIATION

In this Kairos moment, as we await an announcement from the Grand Jury in St. Louis regarding Officer Darren Wilson's murder of 18-year old Michael Brown, we find ourselves at a prophetic juncture for peace and reconciliation.

Amidst the call for peace, there is also a call to be present with one another in such a time as this. There is a great urgency of now to pay close attention to what is happening on the ground in Ferguson, MO. The Ferguson "Hands Up" Action Movement, which was sparked by the murder of Michael Brown, a youth and recent high school graduate at the time of his death, speaks truth to power about realities of social injustices inflicted upon people through mediums of racism, classism and militarization. Ironically, as we prepare for the announcement in Ferguson, hundreds gathered in solidarity in Cleveland, OH to address the murder of yet another youth, 12-year old Tamir Rice who died at the hands of a Cleveland police officer after mistaking his toy gun for a real one.

What is happening in Ferguson speaks volumes to what is bubbling up around the globe. From Ferguson to Hong Kong, Mexico, New York, Palestine, Chicago and to Beavercreek, OH where a man goes into a Walmart store shopping for his family and comes out in a body bag, there is a deep cry for healing and peace. As believers, we trust peace will come. But a precursor for peace and reconciliation is truth-telling. Reconciliation is dependent upon acknowledgement of grievances and acts of injustice.

We wait with prayerful anticipation and hope the Grand Jury will see the great need for this case to go to trial and that peaceful demonstration will follow, no matter what is announced. We pray this case will go to trial so truth-telling can occur, healing can begin, and justice can have its day in court.

The truth is a child is dead and there is an outcry from our youth to recognize their humanity and to say the killing of one human life is wrong. We can't afford to look away as young people; disproportionately youth of color—are dying. Every youth have a right to live without fear of being profiled or murdered. Every youth should be able to walk down his or her community's streets and make it home without fear of dying. Every youth should be affirmed in knowing his or her life matters—no matter your socio-economic background, orientation, location or race.

The truth is all lives matter. The Ferguson movement can be found in nearly any city or town. It is not about Michael Brown alone, Trayvon Martin or any one child. The truth is, this movement is about recognizing the precious value of all human life, affirming all of our youth and their visionary leadership, and addressing the systemic roots of a disheartening culture of violence in our society.

Even after the Grand Jury announcement, Ministry for Youth Advocacy & Leadership Formation of the United Church of Christ will remain steadfast alongside covenanted ministry partners of the denomination, in solidarity with these young leaders because this movement does not end with that decision.

For over 100 days, the youth and young adults have lead a peaceful movement and have courageously stood on the front lines in Ferguson inspiring global awareness and replication. As a faith community, we must be courageous and bold to speak truth and go to the margins and be present with these our children. I confess to the young people—we, the church, have not been here with you as visibly and as boldly as we should. But we heard your cries from the streets just as the blood of Abel cried out from the ground. We must respond to those cries. We can't afford to look away as young people are dying.

Monday, November 24, 2014

All lives matter. And the lives of Black and Brown youth and young adults matter, too. We must pray and we must grieve. But we must speak truth to power and we must act collectively to stop these tragic narratives.

For over 100 days, our youth and young adults have said enough is enough. They have said, in the words of the late Eric Garner, we “can’t breathe” and “This stops today!”

This—the murder of children and babies, denying them the basic right to live, play, grow, go to college and fulfill dreams. What happens to a dream deferred?

This—the economic sanctions of a New Jim Crow that creates ghettos.

This—the disproportionate, racist and biased sentencing of poor people of color.

This—that which nurtures a culture of violence and crime and cultivates poverty and classism.

This—social apathy and normalization or acceptance of racism.

This—must stop today.

In bearing witness to the lives of Emmitt Till, Rekia Boyd, Trayvon Martin, Shereese Francis, John Crawford, Vonderrit Myers, Kendrec McDade, Daniel Tillison, Miriam Carey, Sean Bell, Timothy Russell, Malissa Williams, Tarika Wilson and her one year old child, Aiyana Jones, and a score of others whose names remain unknown, we weep as Rachel wept for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they are no more. (Jeremiah 31:15)

The truth is every child matters and every person matters. The question is, do we remain silent or boldly get up and speak this indisputable truth? All of God’s children got a right to the tree of life and to have a future and hope.

Cheyenne Green, a young leader with Lost Voices of St. Louis said with optimistic vigor that “As long as we’re alive, there is hope for anything.”

This is why we must sing. This is why Ferguson matters. No matter the verdict. No matter the headlines. The truth is the leadership, vigor and spirited commitment of our youth and this movement offers prophetic witness and hope for us all. In that truth, we pray, is a pathway to healing and reconciliation.

In truth,

Waltrina

Rev. Waltrina N. Middleton
National Minister for Youth Advocacy and Leadership Formation
United Church of Christ
youth@ucc.org